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Indo-China Crisis

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INDO- CHINA CRISIS

2/8/54

Speech of Senator Mike Mansfield (D. Mont.)

We are now in the third week of debate on the Bricker amendment, a week during which the Resolution will be discussed but not voted on. We will continue into another week and, perhaps still another. I recognize that the question is one of great importance and I do not in any way mean to deprecate the Senate's concern in this matter. But I cannot believe that it is of such urgency that we ought to neglect other vital issues which are pressing in on the nation. After all, the treaty-making power in its present form has served the United States for 160 odd years. I trust, therefore, that the Senate will bear with me in a brief discussion of another vital issue.

I would not do so unless I felt that the matter which I am about to discuss requires the urgent attention of the Senate. Last September, I travelled several thousand miles in the three states of Indo-China. The war that is going on there was then in a relatively quiet phase. The towns and cities appeared peaceful and there was a note of optimism, a hope that perhaps the French and the Associated States of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam were going to win out over the Communists and hold this vital territory in the camp of free nations.

No the situation has suddenly changed. The news of the change is on the inside pages of the press but, in many respects, it overshadows in importance to the nation the headlines which will soon be forgotten. Brief notes, a few paragraphs here and there, tell of the swiftly developing crisis in Indo-China. If not closely observed, this crisis might easily resolve itself into a Communist victory or the entanglement of the United States in another Korean situation.

The Communist-led Vietminh forces have opened up a new offensive into northern Laos and are moving rapidly in the direction of the royal capital of Luang Prabang. The Vietminh command has probably thrown at least a division and possibly more into northern Laos and has two additional divisions on the Vietnam-Laos border. The seriousness of the situation is shown by the news blackout imposed on February 3 by the French high command on information from northern Laos.

Of grave concern is the effect of these victories of Ho Chi-minh's forces on Paris. The French mood parallels that of some Americans in the grim winter of 1950 when our forces were withdrawing from north Korea. Many wish to abandon Indo-China. And if the French quit the struggle the gateway of South Asia is open to the onward march of Communist imperialism.

Deserting Vietnam troops have cost additional vital outposts in southern Vietnam as the Communist invaders of northern Laos sweep onward and Red Forces harass positions elsewhere in Indo-China. Approximately 40 military posts in Cochinchina have been seized by Communist-led rebels during the last two weeks. At least half fell through treason or desertion. Vietnamese troops have gone over to the Vietminh, evidently without a struggle and of their own volition. This may indicate the success which Communist-leader Ho Chi-minh has had in personifying himself as a leader of anticolonial and antiwestern nationalism instead of what he actually is -- the leader of the Communist forces against France and the Associated States.

In my report on Indo-China to the Committee on Foreign Relations on October 27, 1953, I pointed out that one of the most important elements in a successful termination of hostilities lies in the mobilization of the local people against the Communists. At the same time I stated that a substantial part of the population, at present indifferent, would, if success is to be achieved, have to enter into active participation on the non-communist side. Failure to utilize the power latent in nationalism serves merely to increase the cost to ourselves and to France of preventing the Communists from seizing Indo-China. This has been emphasized by the statement of President Eisenhower at a news conference on Wednesday, February 3, in which he stated that:

"Everyone knows that the heart and soul of the population usually becomes the biggest factor of success or failure in a situation such as Indo-China."

The President further observed that if the Vietnamese wanted to be free; if they believed that through this kind of war they will be free, there probably will be a success in that area.

The only way to insure success in the struggle against Communism in Indo-China is for the people of the Associated States to put their shoulders to the wheel. They must stop the squabbling which has been going on between the numerous religious and political groups in the area and recognize the fact that whether or not they will achieve independence promised them by the French, as a matter of their own choosing and,

in large part, their own responsibility.

The situation has already deteriorated during the past few weeks, so much so that the French Government has asked the American Government to send additional American technicians and planes to the Indo-China theater. While considering and acceding to these requests we should look at the military situation in Indo China.

The French have in excess of 400,000 troops of various kinds in this theatre of war. They are led by extremely capable officers in the persons of Generals Navarre, Bodet and Cogny. The French have also put one of their ablest diplomatic officials, Maurice de Jean, into the office of High Commissioner for Indo-China. The Communist forces, lead by Ho Chi-minh, are estimated to number approximately 300,000 men.

In addition to the numerical superiority of the French and the Associated States, these forces have in general, sufficient military supplies, with which to carry on the war. I was told that repeatedly by both American and French officials during my study mission to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia and recent information substantiates this fact. The only items which are cited by French authorities in the area as being in short supply are helicopters and small naval craft for use in the delta areas. These shortages are being filled by additional shipments from the United States. A request of 25 C-47 transports was sent to Indo-China in December of last

year. The French have been receiving a steady flow of American aid and in January the 400th ship carrying American assistance to Indo-China arrived at Haiphong, an additional 50 shipments since August, 1953. These shipments have included ammunition, transports and combat vehicles, military air craft, navy vessels, communication equipment, small arms and automatic weapons, artillery, ammunition, hospital supplies, engineering and other technical equipment.

In my report to the Foreign Relations Committee I stated that "without a vast increase in striking power the Vietminh will not be defeated. This increase, primarily a question of manpower, cannot come from France already hard-pressed to meet commitments elsewhere. It certainly can not come from this country. It can come only from the three Indo-Chinese States."

"And it is right that it should come from them. Their hope for freedom and national existence is at stake. If they have the will to sustain themselves as independent nations, the French have pledged themselves to continue to support them until the Communists are defeated. As for the material needed to insure the resistance, we have not stinted in our assistance in the past and we are not likely to do so in the future."

And the State which can make the greatest contribution by far, if it will forget its internal squabbling and shoulder the responsibilities it must if it is to become and remain independent, is the State of Vietnam. The Laotians had in October, 1953, one battalion, today they have 13. The Cambodians had approximately 10 battalions.

The Vietnamese had something like 80 battalions in being and with plans calling for a force within a few years on the order of 200 battalions. It was the hope of the French Command that as an area became pacified it could be turned over, militarily and administratively to the Vietnamese troops and the Vietnam Government. Some degree of success has been achieved in this policy but one wonders how long it will take if desertions like those which occurred in South Vietnam continue. The pacification of hostile areas in Cambodia and Laos has not been -- and is not yet -- a serious problem because the Vietminh forces have been operating largely in Vietnam.

It is my understanding that President Eisenhower has appointed a Committee to report to the National Security Council on the problem of Indo-China. It is my further understanding that the President has authorized an additional shipment of B 26 bombers for the Indo-China theater. According to press reports France has asked for 400 United States technicians to help service these and other planes and to train French and Vietnamese technicians. Over the week-end the press has carried stories to the effect that 200 Air Force ground technicians have been sent to Indo-China. I might say that on the basis of my knowledge of the situation in Indo-China the question of maintenance of air craft by American personnel has been one of the projects of the Military Advisory Assistance Group over the past several months. This addition, therefore, is a logical extension of a practice already underway.

The situation in Indo-China is ever-increasingly, a world problem

and answers must be found for the questions arising out of this South-eastern Asia crisis. Before we commit ourselves more deeply in this area, the Senate and the American people are entitled to know these answers.

If we are about to be drawn more deeply into the military situation on the Asia mainland, as some people seem to fear and as some press reporters hint at, has the Administration undertaken at this point to replace our conventional forces and place reliance on atomic weapons? One need not be a military strategist to know that the kind of wars being fought in Asia are largely rifle wars, not atomic wars.

Does the sending of technicians to Indo-China mean that additional American military personnel will be sent to that area?

Does it mean that if the French and Associated States forces become harder-pressed we will send in naval and air support?

Does it mean that if the situation warrants it, American combat troops will be sent to Indo-China?

Does it mean that action has been or will be taken without notifying the proper committees of Congress as to just what kind of a policy we intend to pursue in that area?

We cannot afford to permit the situation in Indo-China to drift any longer. A few months ago I said on my return from that area that the issue there could be met successfully by a three-pronged effort of the Indo-Chinese, the French and the United States. I reported then that each had a part to play: Ours, to supply the essential equipment and

material -- which we have; the Associated States, primarily the Vietnamese and Cambodian nationalists, to develop the will to freedom among the people and the determination to fight for it -- which is open to serious question; the French, to assist in the achievement of that freedom by a combined military and political effort in keeping with their finest traditions -- which they have done.

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